

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 3 TEHRAN 11408

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINS SHUM IR
SUBJ: COMMENT ON RECENT STUDENT AND DISSIDENT DISTURBANCES

REF A. TEHRAN 11098 B. STATE 294128

1. SUMMARY: RECENT DEMONSTRATIONS BY STUDENTS AND ADULT DISSIDENTS ARE SEPARATE BUT RELATED EFFECTS OF A WELL-PUBLICIZED LIBERALIZATION UNDERTAKEN BY THE GOI SINCE LAST SPRING, WHICH IS UNIVERSALLY ATTRIBUTED TO USG PRESSURE. WE SUGGEST THE COMPLEXITIES OF THE PRESENT SITUATION REQUIRE US TO AIM OUR INFLUENCE CAREFULLY. WORKING FOR A DECREASE IN BRUTALITY AND OTHER ABUSES OF THE SECURITY FORCES SHOULD NOT BE CONFUSED WITH SEEKING MORE EXTENSIVE POLITICAL CHANGES. THE DYNAMIC OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN IRAN, WHICH IS FOSTERED BY THE SHAH, IS BOUND TO BRING POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN DUE COURSE. END SUMMARY.

2. DISTRUBANCES OVER PAST TWO MONTHS FALL IN TWO GENERAL CATEGORIES: THOSE INVOLVING PRIMARILY STUDENTS AT IRANIAN UNIVERSITIES AND THOSE INVOLVING OPPOSITION-IST DISSIDENT ELEMENTS OF A LEFTIST-NATIONALIST CAST OR WHO ARE RELIGIOUSLY ORIENTED. THE UNIVERSITY
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DISTRUBANCES HAVE BECOME AN ANNUAL FALL OCCURRENCE IN IAN, -ALTHOUGH THEIR REPRESSION IN THE PERIOD 1972-74 RESULTED IN FEWER SUCH DISTURBANCES IN 1975 AND, PARTICULARLY, 1976. THIS FALL ALL SIGNS INDICATE STUDENTS WERE ENCOURAGED TO DEMONSTRATE BY SHAH'S VISIT TO U.S. AND WELL-ADVERTISED LIBERALIZATION OF LOCAL REGIME CONTROLS WHICH PRECEDED IT. THE LIBERAL-

IZATION IS UNIVERSALLY ATTRIBUTED TO USG PRESSUREES
STEMMING FROM THE HUMAN RIGHTS INTEREST OF THE CARTER
ADMINISTRATION AND CONGRESS.

3. CONSIDERABLE EVIDENCE INDICATES THAT OPPOSITION
ELEMENTS INCLUDING, PERHAPS, SOME OF THE TERRORIST
GROUPS, HAVE ATTEMPTED TO FUEL TRADITIONAL STUDENT
ENTHUSIASM WHILE SIMULTANEOUSLY TESTING THE WATERS OF
GOVERNMENT TOLERANCE BY OPEN LETTERS AND PETITIONS
ALLEGING A VARIETY OF ILLS IN THE CURRENT POLITICAL
SYSTEM WHICH CAN ONLY BE CURED BY RADICAL CHANGES
TO BRING THE SYSTEM OF INTERNAL POLITICS MORE INTO LINE
WITH THEIR INTERPRETATION OF THE IRANIAN CONSTITUTION.
IMPLICIT IN ALL, AND EXPLICIT IN SOME, OF THESE MISSIVES
HAS BEEN THE DEMAND THAT THE SHAH REIGN AND NOT RULE,
EVEN IF HE DOESN'T ABDICATE. MOST MANIFESTOS HAVE BEEN
OF A GENERAL NATURE, THOUGH A FEW HAVE BEEN TAILORED
TO SPECIFIC AIMS SUCH AS NATIONALIZATION OF MORE INDUSTRIES.

4. PARTICULARLY SPECIFIC HAVE BEEN PETITIONS SIGNED
BY LAWYERS, AND IN ONE INSTANCE BY JUDGES, ALLEGING
SERIOUSLY BEEN CURTAILED OVER THE PAST YEARS AND RE-
QUIRES IMMEDIATE MENDING. THIS WOULD INVOLVE REPEAL
OF SEVERAL LEGAL REFORMS (TEHRAN A-75) WHICH HAVE
SET UP ALTERNATIVE (SMALL CLAIMS) COURTS AND A
GOVERNMENT SCHOOL FOR JUDGES WITH THE AIM OF IMPROVING
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THE ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE. (IN FACT, WE ARE
STILL TRYING TO REACH OUR OWN ASSESSMENT AS TO THE
DEGREE OF DISINTERESTEDNESS AND JUSTICE IN THE JUDGES'
DESIRE TO RETURN TO THE JUDICIAL STATUS QUO ANTE.)

5. THE JUDGES' LETTER O THE TOP JUDGE IN THE COUNTRY
(TEHRAN A-176) WAS MET HEAD ON BY THE GOI WITH A
REQUEST THAT THE JUDGES RESCIND THEIR MOST POINTED
CRITICISMS AND CONTINUE O FUNCTION WITHIN THE CURRENT
SYSTEM WHICH THE GOI CONSIDERED BEST FOR IRN'S PRESENT
STAGE OF DEVELOPMENT. A DOZEN JUDGES WHO REFUSED TO GO
ALONG HAVE BEEN SUSPENDED FROM THEIR DUTIES, BUT WE ARE
NOT AWARE OF ANY FURTHER MEASURES TAKEN AGAINST THEM.
APART FROM THIS INSANCE, THERE HAVE BEEN NO MEASURES
TAKEN SPECIFICALLY AGAINST PEOPLE WHO HAVE SIGNED THE
VARIOUS LETTERS AND PETITIONS TO DATE. IN FACT, THIS
SIGNING CONTINUES, THE LATEST BEING A MESSAGE TO THE
PRIME MINISTER SIGNED BY 33 DISSIDENTS (TEHRAN 11098).

6. THE LACK OF GOVERNMENT REACTION TO THESE PETITIONS
OVER THE SUMMER, LEADING INTO THE SHAH'S WASHINGTON
VISIT, OBVIOUSLY ENCOURAGED THEIR SIGNERS AND MANY OLD

OPPOSITIONISTS WHO SYMPATHIZE WITH THEM TO ATTEMPT TO ORGANIZE FURTHER ACTION. A MEETING TOOK PLACE ON THE ROAD BETWEEN TEHRAN AND KARAJ OF OVER A THOUSAND SUCH PEOPLE ON NOVEMBER TWENTY-TWO UNDER THE GUISE OF A SOCIAL GATHERING ON ONE OF IRAN'S HOLY DAYS. THE MEETING WAS BROKEN UP BY SO-CALLED "WORKERS" WHO WERE

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CLEARLY GOVERNMENT-ORGANIZED AGENTS, VERY THINLY DISGUISED IN THEIR MODUS OPERANDI. THIS WAS A REPEITION OF AN EARLIER APPEARANCE OF SUCH GOVERNMENT AGENTS WHO BROKE UP A STUDENT DEMONSTRATION ON ARYAMEHR UNIVERSITY GROUNDS JUST PRIOR TO OFFICIAL SECURITY POLICE MOVING IN FOR SOME ARRESTS. A SIMILAR INCIDENT OCCURRED AT LAHEJAN MORE RECENTLY, ON DECEMBER EIGHT (TEHRAN 11098), WHEN A SIMILAR GROUP OF GOVERNMENT-ORGANIZED "FARMERS" BEAT UP A WELL-KNOWN DISSIDENT SPEAKER AT A SMALL COLLEGE ON THE CASPAIN SEA AND INJURED SOME OF HIS FRIENDS.

7. THE STUDENT DEMONSTRATIONS THEMSELVES HAVE GENERALLY BEEN PUT DOWN BY MORE CONVENTIONAL MEANS USING POLICE TO CONTAIN OR BREAK THEM UP. THIS HAS GENERALLY OCCURRED ON THE MAJOR UNIVERSITY CAMPUSES, THOUGH IN A COUPLE OF INSTANCES THE DEMONSTRATIONS HAD OVERFLOWED INTO TEHRAN'S STREETS BEFORE THEY WER FORCIBLY DISPERSED. UNDER ONE HUNDRED STUDENTS HAVE BEEN CHARGED WITH CRIMINAL OFFENSES, AND THOSE HAVE BEEN IN CIVIL COURTS. MOST OF THE ADDITIONAL TWO TO THREE HUNDRED TAKEN INTO CUSTODY HAVE BEEN RELEASED AFTER IDENTIFICATION. THERE HAVE BEEN

NO ARRESTS OF ADULT DISSIDENTS INVOLVED IN THE KARAJ OR
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LAHEJAN INCIDENTS. A FEW OTHER CASES IN ISFAHAN, SHIRAZ, AND
ELSEWHERE HAVE BEEN SIMILARLY DEALT WITH.

8. MORE OBSCURE AND PUZZLING HAVE BEEN THE CIRCUM-
STANCES SURROUNDING DEMONSTRATIONS BY RELIGIOUS
PERSONS OR IN THE NAME OF RELIGION. TWO INCIDENTS
ARE DOCUMENTED INVOLVING A RELIGIOUS PREACHER CRITI-
CIZING THE PRESENT STATE OF AFFAIRS AND CALLING FOR THE
RETURN OF AYATOLLAH KHOMEINY, A LEFTIST NATIONALIST
LEADER WHO HAS FOR MANY YEARS TAKEN REFUGEE IN IRAQ.
OTHER DEMONSTRATIONS HAVE BEEN ALLEGED BY THE PRESS
AND GOVERNMENT TO INVOLVE EFFORTS BY RELIGIOUS FANATICS
AGAINST THE DESEGREGATION OF WOMEN IN UNIVERSITIES
AND OTHER AGITATION TO REVERSE THE LIBERALIZING
REFORMS OF THE SHAH-PEOPLE, OR "WHITE", REVOLUTION.
IN AT LEAST ONE KNOWN INSTANCE THIS SUMMER, A
PREACHER SPOKE IN VEILED RELIGIOUS TERMS AGAINST THE
SHAH'S RULE, DRAWING A WIDE AUDIENCE IN TEHRAN
WITHOUT ANY POLICE REACTION. HIS EFFORT TO SPEAK
AGAIN FROM THE SAME MOSQUE, HOWEVER, WAS STERNLY MET
BY THE POLICE LAST MONTH, AND HE WAS PREVENTED FROM
MAKING FURTHER PUBLIC APPEARANCES.

9. AS THE PRIME MINISTER TOLD THE AMBASSADOR
RECENTLY (TEHRAN 10827), THE GOI APPEARS TO HAVE
EMBARKED ON A TWO-PRONGED PROGRAM. ON ONE HAND, THERE
IS A CONCERTED EFFORT TO GET OUT THE "SILENT MAJORITY"
WITH THE ASSISTANCE OF THE RASTAKHIZ PARTY MILITANTS,
SO THAT GOVERNMENT AND PARTY WORKERS, PROFESSORS,
STUDENTS, PARENTS AND OTHER IDENTIFIABLE GROUPS MAY
BE LED INTO POSITIVE DEMONSTRATIONS AND OTHER SHOWS
OF LOYALTY TO OVERWHELM THE DISSENTERS AND PERHAPS
TAKE AWAY SOME OF THEIR HEADLINE POTENTIAL IN WORLD NEWS
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MEDIA. ON THE OTHER HAND, THE GOVERNMENT HAS CLEARLY
INSTRUCTED THAT STUDENTS NOT BE PROSECUTED FORMALLY
OR BE PUT INTO JAIL IF THAT COURSE IS AT ALL POSSIBLE
TO AVOID.

10. READING BEHIND THIS STATEMENT OF GOI POLICY WE
SEE A DILEMMA IN THE MIND OF THE CHIEF POLICYMAKER,
THE SHAH. BY RELEASING POLICE GOON SQUADS AGAINST

THE DISSIDENTS, AND ON AT LEAST ONE OCCASION AGAINST THE STUDENTS, HE HAS DEMONSTRATED GOOD INTELLIGENCE SOURCES AMONG THE OPPOSITIONISTS AND AN ABILITY TO HURT MANY OF THESE PEOPLE PHYSICALLY AND DISSUADE ANY FURTHER ORGANIZATION OR ACTION. BY THE SAME TOKEN, HE KNOWS HE IS ENCOURAGING EXTREMISM AND RUNNING THE RISK OF APPEARING REPRESSIVE AND TYRANNOUS TO THE WORLD MEDIA, IN PARTICULAR TO THE AMERICAN PRESS.

11. THERE ARE SOME RELATIVE GAINS OVER THE PAST. SECURITY FORCES HAVE NOT ROUNDED UP THOSE WHO SIGNED THE VARIOUS LETTERS, AND THIS IS AN IMPROVEMENT ON THE TREATMENT OF SUCH OPPOSITIONISTS IN RECENT YEARS. SIMILARLY, THE PRESS HAS BEEN ALLOWED TO CARRY SOME POLITICAL NEWS AND REPORT DISTURBANCES WHICH IT WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN PERMITTED TO MENTION IN PREVIOUS YEARS. THE RASTAKHIZ PARTY'S EFFORTS TO ORGANIZE POLITICAL PARTICIPATION HAVE INCLUDED IN PRACTICE CONSIDERABLE PUBLICITY FOR A GOOD MANY PROBLEMS AND ABUSES EXISTING IN TODAY'S IRAN, AND THE FREQUENT EXHORTATIONS ISSUED FROM THE THRONE INDICATE THAT THE SHAH HIMSELF IS CONCERNED THAT SUCH ABUSES BE CORRECTED AND PROBLEMS SOLVED.

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12. THERE IS LITTLE DOUBT IN OUR MINDS THAT THE SHAH WOULD PREFER A MORE LIBERALIZED ENVIRONMENT THAN HE HAS PERMITTED TO DATE IF THIS WOULD IMPROVE GOVERNMENT EFFICIENCY AND REDUCE THE CORRUPTION THAT MANY COMPLAIN ABOUT IN THIS SOCIETY WITHOUT ENDANGERING HIS ESSENTIAL POLICY-MAKING PREROGATIVES. BY THE SAME TOKEN,

HOWEVER, HE SEES LITTLE TO BE GAINED AND MUCH TO BE LOST BY PERMITTING DESTRUCTIVE CRITICISM, ESPECIALLY WHEN THIS COMES FROM DISCREDITED OPPONENTS OF HIS RULE DATING BACK TO THE 1950'S AND 1960'S. EXACTLY WHAT LIMITED CHANGES HE WOULD PERMIT ARE NOT CLEAR TO US, AND WE SUSPECT ARE STILL NOT CLEAR TO THE SHAH HIMSELF. IF THE WRITERS OF LETTERS -- WHO ARE WELL-KNOWN TO THE SECURITY FORCES -- WERE TO AGREE ON A SET OF SPECIFIC, LIMITED POLITICAL REFORMS, IT IS CONCEIVABLE TO US THAT THE SHAH WOULD THINK THEM OVER SERIOUSLY AND PERMIT SOME STRAINS OF OPPOSITION TO ESTABLISH THEMSELVES LEGITIMATELY. THIS HAS NOT YET HAPPENED.

13. BUT THIS IS LIKELY TO BE A PAINFUL PROCESS FOR AN AGING RULER WHO HAS SPENT THE LAST TWENTY TO THIRTY YEARS IN GAINING AND CONSOLIDATING CONTROL OVER HIS CONFIDENTIAL

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COUNTRY'S POLITICAL PROCESSES. HE IS BOUND TO HAVE MANY DOUBTS AS TO WHAT HE IS RISKING BY ALLOWING SUCH OPPOSITION TO SURFACE, EVEN IN A LIMITED WAY. THERE ARE MANY IN THE SECURITY ESTABLISHMENT AND ELSEWHERE WHO COUNSEL GREATER CAUTION AND NO REFORM. UNDER THESE CIRCUMSTANCES, IT WOULD APPEAR LIKELY THAT THE SHAH WILL MOVE ONLY IN CONJUNCTION WITH EXTERNAL PRESSURES OR REQUIREMENTS AS HE COMES TO APPRECIATE THEM.

14. USG STRATEGY MUST, THEREFORE, CONSIDER SEVERAL VERITIES. FIRST, THE SHAH IS WIDELY RECOGNIZED AS PROBABLY THE ONLY VIABLE GOVERNOR OF IRAN TODAY EVEN BY MANY OF HIS OPPONENTS. SECOND, HE IS FIRMLY IN CONTROL, AND NEITHER TERRORIST EXTREMISTS NOR MODERATE DISSIDENTS, NOR INDEED STUDENT DEMONSTRATORS, WILL SHAKE HIS CONTROL. THIRD, THE SHAH'S POLICY IS EMINENTLY PRO-AMERICAN AND IN FAVOR OF AREA STABILITY. THUS HIS OVERTHROW OR DEATH COULD ONLY OCCUR BY UNIQUE ACCIDENT; OUR BEST INTELLIGENCE INDICATES THAT NOT EVEN THE TERRORISTS OF LEFT AND RIGHT HAVE SOUGHT IT IN RECENT YEARS.

15. OUR NEXT QUESTION MUST BE WHERE WE WISH TO PUT OUR EMPHASIS. SHOULD IMPROVEMENT OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN TERMS OF AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY INVOLVE PRESSING FOR CHANGES IN THE BASIC REGIME -- E.G., BY REINSTITUTING POLICY-MAKING AUTHORITY IN PARLIAMENT, RESTRICTING THE POWERS OF THE SHAH AND OF HIS GOVERNMENT, ETC. -- OR SHOULD IT AIM AT IMPROVING TREATMENT OF PRISONERS, BUILDING MORE SAFEGUARDS AGAINST FALSE ARREST AND IMPRISONMENT, WORKING

FOR GREATER TOLERANCE FOR PEACEFUL CRITICISM OF GOI
PERFORMANCE, IMPROVING JUDICIAL EQUITY, ETC? IT SEEMS TO US THIS
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EMBASSY HAS A MANDATE TO WORK FOR THE SECOND SET OF
AIMS, NOT THE FIRST, AND WE JUDGE THIS EMPHASIS TO
BE WISE, S THE OPTIMUM ACHIEVABLE AT THE PRESENT
STAGE OF HISTORY. MOREOVER, IF WE DELIBERATELY PRESS
FOR BASIC POLITICAL CHANGES, THIS WILL RAISE IN THE
MINDS OF AMANY IRANIANS SPECTRES OF FOREIGN INTERFER-
ENCE IN GOVERNMENT SUCH AS MAKE THE RUSSIANS AND
(EVEN TODAY) THE BRITISH DISTRUSTED AND SUSPECT.

16. THE PEACEFUL REVOLUTION REPRESENTED BY THE
SHAH-PEOPLE OR "WHITE" REVOLUTION IS A REAL DEVELOP-
MENT WHICH HAS PRODUCED GREATER SOCIAL EQUITY AND
LESS PRIVILEGE IN WHAT IS STILL AN ESSENTIALLY EASTERN
SOCIETY TRYING TO TRANSFORM ITSELF INTO A WESTERN ONE.
NONE OF IRAN'S NEIGHBORS, RICH OR POOR, WITH THE EXCEP-
TION OF ISRAEL AND THE POSSIBLE EXCEPTION OF INDIA, CAN
BOAST A FREER OR LESS OPPRESSIVE WAY OF GOVERNMENT.
MOREOVER, THE MARCH OF WESTERN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT,
COUPLED WITH VOLUNTARY POPULAR EMULATION OF THINGS
WESTERN (MAINLY THE U.S., FRENCH, BRITISH, GERMAN AND
ITALIAN) IS PRODUCING ITS OWN CHANGE IN THE VALUE
SYSTEM OF A PEOPLE. THIS IS BOUND OVER A PERIOD OF YEARS
TO LEAD TO GREATER POLITICAL PARTICIPATION.

17. MEANWHILE, IT IS A FACT THAT POLITICAL PARTICI-
PATION WILL BE LIMITED. OUR WN AIM SHOULD BE TO ON-
TINUE ENCOURAGING A DECREASE OF HARSHNESS AND OF
INEQUITABLE TREATMENT OF POLITICAL OPPOSITION BY THE
SECURITY FORCES. THUS, WE WOULD HOPE TO HELP A
SPIRIT OF MODERATION REMAIN IN BEING BELOW THE SURFACE--
EVEN IF IT REMAINS RELATIVELY INACTIVE -- TO ALLOW FOR
ITS RE-EMERGENCE IN FUTURE YEARS. FOR THOSE YEARS ARE
BOUND TO COME, GIVEN THE RATE OF PRO-WESTERN ECONOMIC
AND SOCIAL CHANGE WHICH THE SHAH IS FOSTERING, AND HIS
CARE TO RESTRAIN THOSE ASPECTS OF ARCH-CONSERVATIVE
ISLAMIC INFLUENCE WHICH MIGHT IN OTHER SOCIETIES
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RETARD OR REVERSE WESTERNIZED ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND
EVENTUALLY POLITICAL LIBERALIZATION.
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